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Security Council

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Monday, 23 April 2012, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Rice	(United States of America)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Tarar
	Portugal	Mr. Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 19 April 2012 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2012/247 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Monday, 23 April 2012, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in this meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: Achieving a full and sustained cessation of violence and seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria is at the centre of our efforts in the Middle East. The Council took decisive action on Saturday by authorizing the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria in response to the proposal of the Secretary-General, who strongly welcomed the unanimous adoption of resolution 2043 (2012). The Joint Special Envoy and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations will brief tomorrow on the good offices efforts and the deployment of the observers. I will therefore limit my comments to a few critical points before turning to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

We are at a pivotal moment in Syria. The cessation of armed violence remains incomplete. Too many lives have been lost. Human rights violations are still being perpetrated with impunity. It is our hope that the deployment of observers will help to stop the killing and consolidate the calm. The objective, however, is clearly not to freeze the situation but to create the conditions for a serious and credible political process. The Joint Special Envoy has called on both the Government and the opposition to engage in such a process as a matter of utmost priority. It is essential that the Government of Syria fully and immediately implement its obligations to stop using heavy weapons and to pull back military forces from population centres. Action on the other aspects of the six-point plan is no less important. Measures taken by the Syrian authorities to date, including on the release of arbitrarily detained persons and respect for the right to demonstrate peacefully, are clearly insufficient. Both would be critical elements to creating the conditions for a political solution through peaceful dialogue.

Ending the suffering of the people most affected by the fighting also continues to be a top priority of our collective efforts. The second meeting of the Syria Humanitarian Forum took place on 20 April in Geneva. This important mechanism, chaired by the United Nations with the co-facilitation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union and the League of Arab States, gathered some 350 participants

from Member States, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and international non-governmental organizations. Syrian Government representatives recognized that there are serious humanitarian needs. However, little progress has been made so far on allowing the full and unimpeded access and increased capacity of agencies on the ground required to ensure the timely provision of humanitarian assistance. We urge the Government to take all necessary steps to facilitate the humanitarian response, as 1 million people are in need. We welcome in this regard the generous mobilization of donors' support at the Syria Humanitarian Forum meeting.

Let me now turn to the Middle East peace process. For the United Nations, achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians is an undiminished priority. The Secretary-General was pleased to join his Quartet partners in Washington, D.C., on 11 April, in order to reflect on developments over the past six months and forge a way forward that builds on the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. Quartet principals heard a briefing from Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh on ongoing Jordanian efforts to promote exploratory talks. After a pause, negotiators met again in Amman in early April and agreed to an exchange of letters outlining their positions. Both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu have since continued to reiterate their desire to negotiate. Although the environment remains fragile, any opportunity to pursue dialogue towards a resumption of meaningful negotiations must be welcomed and supported.

As previously agreed between the parties, on 17 April a senior Palestinian delegation met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem to deliver a letter from President Abbas. Prime Minister Netanyahu has indicated his intention to respond in writing. A joint statement following the meeting noted the commitment of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to achieving peace. It is our hope that this exchange of letters can provide an opening for further dialogue.

At the same time, the Quartet recognized the urgent need for tangible signs of progress on the ground. It particularly underscored the need for continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's important institution-building efforts. It further drew attention to the need for $1.1 billion in assistance to meet the Palestinian Authority's 2012 recurrent financing requirements. The Quartet urged the speedy conclusion of efforts to resolve outstanding issues related to tax and customs revenue collection. It further singled out the need to improve development for Area C in the West Bank as central to the viability of a future Palestinian State. Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime so they do not have to resort to building unauthorized structures that lead to unjustified demolitions, which often impact the most vulnerable people. Access to Area C will also enable much-needed urban development, particularly in areas adjacent to established cities.

Reminding both parties of their obligations under the Road Map, the Quartet reiterated its call on them to avoid actions that undermine trust. Absent a political horizon, the fragility of the situation on the ground raises serious concerns. On 30 March, on the occasion of Land Day, large demonstrations were held in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as in Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and, to a smaller extent, Egypt and Syria. Clashes between demonstrators and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resulted in one Palestinian being killed and some 180 wounded. The IDF used crowd-control measures aimed at minimizing the number of casualties, which otherwise would have been higher. Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza also took measures to avoid bloodshed, and in Lebanon the Lebanese authorities took measures to prevent tension and violence in the immediate vicinity of the Blue Line. Nevertheless, we remain mindful that, in the current tenuous environment, there is always the risk of an eruption of violence.

This risk was further illustrated by the security incidents observed this month. Clashes between demonstrators and the IDF resulted in four Palestinian deaths and 293 injuries, including among 30 children. The IDF conducted 314 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which one Palestinian was killed and 248 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured. Two IDF soldiers were also injured. Two hundred and nine Palestinians were arrested. On 18 April, the Israeli military suspended a senior military officer who had assaulted a foreign activist in the West Bank and a commando soldier who killed a Palestinian during a training session in a West Bank village. On 2 April, Israeli security forces raided a Palestinian media centre in East Jerusalem, seizing equipment and files. On two occasions, on 2 and

19 April, Israeli citizens were attacked in East Jerusalem — reportedly, by a Palestinian armed with an axe, in the first instance; neither sustained life-threatening injuries.

The Quartet has taken note of the significant progress on security achieved by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces have continued their efforts to maintain law and order in the West Bank. However, there were a few incidents. On 15 April, one Palestinian militant was killed, and several others were injured, in a shoot-out with Palestinian security forces conducting an arrest raid near Jenin. With respect to the transparent enforcement of law and order by Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank, we are particularly concerned about reports about an increase in arrests or intimidation of Palestinian journalists and bloggers for expressing their views.

The Israeli Government has announced tenders for more than 1,000 housing units in the occupied Palestinian territory, 870 of which are in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa, with the remainder in a settlement in the West Bank. Those actions undermine efforts to achieve a two-State solution and are contrary to international law.

As a result of a court case brought by an Israeli settler association, two Palestinian households of refugee families were evicted from their homes in the heart of the Palestinian neighbourhood of Beit Hanina, in East Jerusalem. In total, 54 Palestinian structures, including 14 residences, were demolished in the West Bank, leading to the displacement of 117 Palestinians, including 63 children.

The Quartet is concerned about the ongoing settler violence in the West Bank and called on Israel to take effective measures, including bringing the perpetrators of such acts to justice. On 4 April, Israeli security forces evacuated 12 settler families who had taken up residence in a house in Hebron.

The Secretary-General follows closely the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centres. Some 320 remain under administrative detention. On 1 April, the case of prisoner Hana Shalabi came to an end when she agreed to be deported to Gaza, after a 43-day hunger strike. However, on 17 April, demonstrations in Gaza and the West Bank took place to commemorate Palestinian Prisoners Day, and 1,200 Palestinian prisoners reportedly started an open-ended hunger strike to protest the conditions of Palestinian prisoners.

Turning to Gaza, the Quartet, while reaffirming its previous positions, stated that the situation in and around Gaza will remain unsustainable so long as it is not reunited with the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority adhering to the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The reconciliation process has yet to see any progress since the Doha declaration of 6 February. The Quartet further underscored the importance of continued steps to address the needs of Gaza's residents, and welcomed the Israeli Government's approval at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on priority United Nations infrastructure projects in Gaza.

This month, a total of 13 rockets, including 1 Grad rocket and 11 mortars, were fired from Gaza into Israel, while the IDF conducted 3 incursions and 3 airstrikes into Gaza. Clashes in Gaza resulted in the death of two Palestinian civilians and one militant. Thirty-nine civilians and two militants were injured. One Palestinian was killed in tunnel-related activities. Two Palestinians were killed by IDF troops on 1 and 3 April, respectively, when approaching the security fence. One was allegedly armed and trying to plant explosives, but the second was an unarmed 17-year-old boy. Indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel must cease and Israeli forces must show maximum restraint.

On 7 April, Hamas de facto authorities executed three prisoners, two of them charged with criminal cases and one accused of collaboration with Israel. The execution was carried out without the approval of President Abbas, as required by Palestinian basic law. Palestinian and international human rights organizations have strongly condemned the continued Hamas policy of execution in Gaza. The United Nations continues to call for the cessation of all military trials by Palestinian authorities.

In another development, on 5 March two Grad rockets were reportedly fired from the Sinai peninsula towards the Israeli city of Eilat. One rocket landed near a residential area, causing minor damage.

The Secretary-General welcomed the recent meeting and joint public commitments of Israelis and Palestinians. What is important now is to transform that fragile opening into an opportunity to

incrementally promote dialogue while ensuring continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's institution-building efforts.

Let me briefly turn to the situation in Lebanon. On 4 April, Mr. Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese forces, escaped an apparent assassination attempt when two bullets were fired at him in the garden of his residence, narrowly missing their target. The Lebanese authorities are investigating that attack on the life of one of its major political figures.

The situation along Lebanon's borders with Syria remains of concern. On 9 April, a cameraman for the Lebanese television network Al-Jadeed was killed in the Lebanese border region of Wadi Khaled by gunfire emanating from the Syrian side. President Sleiman, Prime Minister Mikati and representatives across the entire political spectrum in Lebanon condemned the incident. The Lebanese authorities have launched an inquiry into the incident and have requested that Syrian authorities undertake their own investigation.

The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to the 9,700 Syrian refugees registered in northern Lebanon, as well as on matters of protection and the determination of their status. Special Coordinator Plumbly toured the area on 17 April and met with local political and security representatives and with Syrian refugees. In the eastern Lebanese Bekaa Valley, the latest assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is that approximately 7,500 Syrian refugees are receiving assistance.

The overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has remained generally quiet and stable. Air violations by the Israeli Defense Forces have continued on an almost daily basis.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour: On behalf of Palestine, I congratulate you, Madam President, as well as your country, the United States of America, on your presidency of the Security Council this month. We are fully confident in your leadership. I also express appreciation to the United Kingdom for its skilled stewardship of the Council in the month of March. I also express our appreciation for the important briefing to the Council today given by Mr. Lynn Pascoe.

In spite of relentless Israeli assaults on the rights, land and very existence of the Palestinian people, they remain committed to peace and have not forsaken their legitimate national aspirations, including for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination in their homeland. That was reconfirmed in the letter conveyed on 17 April by President Mahmoud Abbas to Prime Minister Netanyahu. It is a reaffirmation of our genuine commitment to the path of peace and a direct call on Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its illegal expansionism and oppression of the Palestinian people, respect international law and not miss this historic opportunity for peace.

In word and deed, the Palestinian leadership has upheld its obligations and adhered to the historic compromise consecrated in the 1988 Palestinian declaration of independence and the Palestine Liberation Organization's participation in the Middle East peace process since its inception, more than two decades ago, with the aim of achieving the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and on comprehensive peace. Astoundingly, that commitment has prevailed in spite of Israel's systematic aggression, colonization and human rights violations, by which it continues to cause immense suffering to the Palestinian people and to obstruct the peace process, undermine the Palestinian Authority and destroy the principles and objectives of the two-State solution.

Moreover, despite the failure to hold Israel accountable and to fulfil the legal and moral obligations towards Palestine, it is clear that the international community has also not forsaken the noble goal of peace for Palestine and Israel and the wider region. That is attested to, inter alia, by the countless initiatives and consistent calls for ending the Israeli occupation and for achieving Palestine's independence by Governments and international and regional organizations, including the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, the African Union, the India-Brazil-South Africa trilateral mechanism, the Summit of South American-Arab Countries and others. Of course, this also includes the efforts of the Quartet and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, including

the recent Brussels meeting and the 11 April Quartet statement (see SG/2182), despite that it falls short of expectations given the responsibilities undertaken by the Quartet.

It is also reflected in the provision of humanitarian aid and financial assistance to Palestine. And it is certainly reflected in the strong expressions of solidarity by peace-loving people from all over the globe who continue in ways large and small to support our people. Here, we condemn again Israel's excessive force and incitement against Palestinian civilians protesting the occupation, as well as against international activists peacefully supporting Palestine, ranging from the killing of an American citizen, Rachel Corrie, to the criminal attack on the Gaza humanitarian flotilla, in which nine Turkish civilians were murdered, to the latest incident of brutality by an Israeli commander against a young Danish peace activist and several other activists.

All such support reaffirms the international commitment to our just cause and nourishes our resilience. That is why, despite our intense despair and frustration, we have not given up on the goal of the independence of a sovereign, viable, contiguous, democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, based on the pre-1967 borders and a just, agreed solution to the Palestine refugee problem. Yet, we are all aware that hope cannot be sustained in a vacuum. Without a credible political horizon, our hopes and convictions are being eroded. The continuity of this horizon is being obstructed by Israel's refusal to respect the longstanding parameters of the peace process, enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and Israel's brazen impunity, which makes peace seem impossible.

Belief in the two-State solution is diminishing, particularly as Israel continues its illegal settlement activities all over the occupied Palestinian territory, including occupied East Jerusalem, leading us to a point where many now openly question the attainability of that solution and where the consideration of alternative solutions is on the rise. The failure to bring a halt to Israel's settlement campaign, which would enable us to overcome the impasse and resume direct negotiations, threatens to unravel all that has been achieved to date and to usher in an era of even greater instability and uncertainty.

In the period since our debate in January, and even in just the few days since the delivery of President Mahmoud Abbas's letter, Israel has forged ahead non-stop with its illegal colonization campaign, confiscating land, building settlements and the wall, demolishing homes and infrastructure, and evicting Palestinian families. Israeli officials continue to make provocative declarations regarding settlement expansion, apparently vying with each other for the largest land grabs, along with flagrant attempts to entrench illegal settlement outposts on Palestinian land, including attempts by the Israeli Prime Minister himself.

We have drawn the Security Council's attention to such illegal actions in the recent period in and around the cities of Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and Al-Khalil, as well as to horrific acts committed against Palestinians by Israeli settlers with the full support of the Israeli Government. It is by now well-known that the Palestinian presence in many of those areas, especially in East Jerusalem, the Christian community in the Bethlehem area and the Bedouin community in the Jordan Valley, is being gravely threatened; livelihoods, particularly in agriculture, are being devastated; and entire communities, such as those in Al-Khalil, are living under the constant terror of extremist settlers. Regrettably, however, our appeals have been to no avail, and the Council remains unable to uphold its duties to stop Israel's aggression, which is further destabilizing the situation and literally destroying the two-State solution.

The international community cannot remain on the sidelines. The Security Council's Charter duties are clear, as are the responsibilities of United Nations Member States and the obligations of the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Serious, practical measures must be undertaken to compel Israel to halt its illegal settlement activities and all other related unlawful policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to begin genuinely moving towards ending this illegitimate, belligerent 45-year-old occupation.

Israel must stop expanding its massive network of settlements and the wall, stop its deceitful attempts regarding the establishment of illegal settlement outposts, and stop its displacement of Palestinians, notably in the areas of the West Bank commonly referred to as Area C. It must be pointed out that, while the designation of Area C under the Oslo Accords was,

like the Accords themselves, intended as a temporary measure, it has instead become frozen in time by the occupying Power for its own obvious illegal gain. There, Israel continues to gravely harm the Palestinian presence and Palestinian development, rabidly pursuing illegal measures to alter the demographic composition, character and status of that vast area of land in order to ease its de facto annexation, which must be completely rejected.

Tensions have also risen in the recent period owing to intensification of the Palestinian prisoner crisis. Thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children, are have been inhumanely imprisoned by the occupying Power, which routinely violates their human rights and subjects them to severe humiliation and torture. Among the prisoners, hundreds have been held under "administrative detention" for months and years without charge or trial, with several Palestinians undertaking hunger strikes in protest of that illegal practice, with several of them on hunger strike for over one month. Moreover, on 17 April, a day of solidarity observed as Palestinian Prisoners Day, approximately 1,600 Palestinians in Israeli prisons joined the hunger strike in a peaceful, non-violent protest against their captivity and the deplorable conditions under which they are being held.

We call on the international community to immediately address that crisis. It must be demanded that Israel respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and under human rights law. It cannot be permitted to continue its daily arrests — with at least 2,000 Palestinians arrested since the prisoner exchange in October alone, including some released in the exchange — and abusive treatment of Palestinian prisoners, with no recourse for the victims of this policy, which is destroying the hearts, minds and spirits of so many of our citizens and destroying our society's fabric. We call for an end to that illegal Israeli practice and for the release of all Palestinian prisoners.

We have also, in the recent period, drawn the Council's attention to Israel's escalation of attacks against the Gaza Strip, wherein the occupying Power has carried out a series of military strikes against civilian areas, including extrajudicial killings, which in the course of a few days in early March led to the killing of at least 18 Palestinians, among them children, and the wounding of dozens of other civilians. Israeli military operations have also included assaults against Palestinians commemorating Land Day on 30 March, in which the occupying forces fired tear gas, stun grenades and live ammunition, killing a young man and wounding more than 300. Such acts of aggression continue to traumatize the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, where the civilian population continues to suffer vastly from the devastating impact of the Israeli blockade and the criminal Israeli military aggression of 2008-2009 — for which, to date, there has been regrettably, no accountability and no justice, which our people and leadership continue to demand.

Israel's settlement campaign — the main obstacle to the peace process — as well as the blockade of Gaza, the imprisonment of Palestinians and all other forms of collective punishment against our people must be ceased, in order to avert the escalation of tensions and a further deterioration of the situation. The Security Council must find the political will to act. An unequivocal demand must be made for Israel, as the occupying Power and as a State Member of the United Nations, to abide by its legal obligations under the Charter, the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions. It is time to end the selective application of the law and the shameful pretexts, which have only fed Israeli impunity. Should Israel choose to ignore this appeal — instead entrenching the occupation and continuing to oppress the Palestinian people — the international community has a responsibility to act to bring an end to this unlawful situation.

In that context, we stress the importance of the proposed Security Council visit to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such a visit, long-overdue, would reaffirm the Council's role in securing peace and enhancing its engagement and credibility. Moreover, it would allow Council members to assess first-hand the reality on the ground under Israel's occupation, thereby better informing their understanding of the various dimensions of the conflict and of the efforts needed to overcome the obstacles to direct negotiations and to salvage the two-State solution along pre-1967 borders. We urge Council members to make a positive decision soon on the matter.

Furthermore, we reiterate our call on the depositary State, Switzerland, to take the necessary measures to convene a conference of the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to determine means to ensure respect of the Convention in

the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We stress the value of such a conference for upholding the rule of law, compelling compliance by Israel and reaffirming the primacy of international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including under foreign occupation.

I conclude by reiterating that the Palestinian leadership remains committed to its international obligations and the pursuit of peace, justice and the fulfilment of the rights and national aspirations of the Palestinian people in accordance with international legality.

It is time for Israel to respect the law and finally respond to the historic, genuine compromise made by the Palestinian people and the Arab States, as enshrined in the Arab Peace Initiative, now in its tenth year, and to respond to the hand that continues to be extended for peace. In word and deed, Israel must prove that it is serious about ending its military occupation of Palestinian land since 1967 and reaching a comprehensive peace that will allow the Palestinian people to live in freedom in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, achieve justice, including for the Palestine refugees, and allow Israel and Palestine to peacefully coexist and thrive side by side, as well as with all our neighbours in the region, ensuring a future of freedom, dignity and security for all of our children.

Should Israel once again respond with intransigence and impunity, undermining all of our efforts and deepening the impasse, the Palestinian people and their leadership will not give up, but will continue to pursue all peaceful, non-violent, legitimate political, diplomatic and legal avenues in the international arena to ensure the restoration of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights and the ultimate achievement of peace and justice. We will not cease our appeals to the international community to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Let me begin by thanking you personally, Madam President, for your outstanding leadership of the Security Council this month.

Churchill once said that in the time it takes a lie to get halfway around the world, the truth is still getting its pants on. In the barren deserts of the Middle East, myths find fertile ground to grow wild. Facts often remain buried in the sand. The myths forged in our region travel abroad — and can find their way, surprisingly, even into this Chamber. I would like to use today's debate as an opportunity to address just a few of the myths that have become a permanent hindrance to our discussion of the Middle East here at the United Nations.

Myth number one is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the central conflict in the Middle East. If you solve that conflict, you have solved all the other conflicts in the region. Make no mistake; it is important for Israel and the Palestinians to find a resolution to our long-standing conflict for its own merits. Yet the truth is that conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain and many other parts of the Middle East have absolutely nothing to do with Israel.

It is obvious that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not stop the persecution of minorities across the region, end the subjugation of women or heal sectarian divides. Obsessing over Israel has not stopped Al-Assad's tanks from flattening entire communities. On the contrary, it has only distracted attention from his crimes. Even this morning's debate has lost any sense of proportion. Thousands are being killed in Syria, hundreds in Yemen and dozens in Iraq. Yet, this debate once again is repeatedly and obsessively focused on the legitimate actions of the Government of the only democracy in the Middle East.

Dedicating the majority of this debate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, month after month, has not stopped the Iranian regime's centrifuges from spinning. Iran's ambitions for nuclear weapons are the single greatest threat to the Middle East and the entire world. The Iranian nuclear programme continues to advance at the speed of an express train. The international community's efforts to stop it are moving at the pace of the local train, pausing and stopping at every station for some nations to get on and off. The danger of inaction is clear. We cannot allow the diplomatic channel to provide another avenue for the Iranian regime to stall for more time, as it inches closer and closer to a nuclear weapon.

Myth number two is that there is a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. In fact, numerous international organizations have said clearly that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including the deputy head of the Red Cross office in the area. Gaza's real gross

domestic product grew by more than 25 per cent during the first three quarters of 2011. Exports are expanding. International humanitarian projects are moving forward at a rapid pace. There is not a single civilian good that cannot enter Gaza today. Yet, as aid flows into the area, missiles fly out. That is the crisis in Gaza, and that is what keeps Gaza from realizing its real potential.

It is a simple equation. If it is calm in Israel, it will be calm in Gaza. But the people of Gaza will face hardship as long as terrorists use them as human shields to rain rockets down on Israeli cities. Each rocket in Gaza is armed with a warhead capable of causing a political earthquake that would extend well beyond Israel's borders. It will take only one rocket landing in the wrong place at the wrong time to change the equation on the ground. If that happens, Israel's leaders will be forced to respond in a completely different manner. It is time for everyone in the Chamber to finally wake up to that dangerous reality. The Security Council has not condemned a single rocket attack from Gaza. History's lessons are clear. Today's silence is tomorrow's tragedy.

Myth number three is that settlements are the primary obstacle to peace. How many times have we heard that argument in this Chamber? Just this month, the Human Rights Council proposed yet another fact-finding mission to Israel. It will explore — surprise, surprise — Israeli settlements.

Today I would like to save the Human Rights Council and the international community some time and energy. The facts have already been found. They are plain for all to see. The fact is that, from 1948 to 1967, the West Bank was part of Jordan and Gaza was part of Egypt. The Arab world did not lift a finger to create a Palestinian State, and it sought Israel's annihilation when not a single settlement stood anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza. The fact is that in 2005, when I was Director General of Israel's Foreign Service, we took every settlement out of Gaza and got only rockets on our cities in return. The fact is that the Israeli Government put in place an unprecedented 10-month moratorium on settlements. The Palestinian leadership used that gesture as an opportunity to take Israel and the international community on another ride to nowhere. For nine of those 10 months, it rejected the moratorium as insufficient, and then demanded that we extend it. As former United States Special Envoy George Mitchell said, "What had been less than worthless a few months earlier became indispensable to continue negotiations" to the Palestinians.

The primary obstacle to peace is not settlements. The primary obstacle to peace is the so-called claim of return and the Palestinians' refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist as the nation State of the Jewish people. We will never hear Palestinian leaders say "two States for two peoples". We will not hear them say "two States for two peoples" because today the Palestinian leadership is calling for an independent Palestinian State, but insists that its people return to the Jewish State. That would mean the destruction of Israel.

Some might say, "Oh Ambassador, but the Palestinians know that they will have to give up that claim; that is what they whisper quietly at the negotiating table". The Palestinian leadership has never said publicly — either to the Palestinian people, to the Arab world, to the international community, or to anyone else — that it will give up the so-called claim of return. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community has the responsibility and duty to tell them the truth. The international community has a duty to stand up and say that the so-called claim of return is a non-starter.

Instead of telling the Palestinian people the truth, much of the international community stands idle as the Arab world tries to erase the Jewish people's historical connection to the land of Israel. Across the Arab world, and even at this table, we hear claims that Israel is "Judaizing Jerusalem". To my mind, those accusations come about 3,000 years too late. It is like accusing the National Basketball Association of Americanizing basketball.

Like many nations around this table, the Jewish people have a proud, age-old legacy of kings and queens. In our case, however, the tradition goes back a few years earlier. Since King David laid the cornerstone of his palace in the tenth century BC, Jerusalem has served as the heart of our faith.

In debate after debate, speakers sit in this Chamber and say that Israel is committing ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem, even though the percentage of Arab residents in the city has grown from 26 per cent to 35 per cent since 1967.

The holiest sites in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, were closed only to Jews from

1948 until 1967. Everyone could come to see those sites except Jews. There was absolutely no freedom of worship. The world did not say a word about the situation in Jerusalem at that time. Since Israel unified the city, it has thrived under the values of tolerance and freedom. For the first time in centuries, sacred places that were once sealed off along religious lines are now permanently open for worship by all peoples. That is a principle grounded in our values, our actions and our laws.

There is another great truth that the Organization has completely overlooked for the past 64 years. In all of the pages that the United Nations has written about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in all of its reports and fact-finding commissions, and in all the hours dedicated to debate about the Middle East, there is one great untold story. Or, to be more specific, there are more than 850,000 untold stories.

More than 850,000 Jews have been uprooted from their homes in Arab countries during the past 64 years. Those were vibrant communities dating back 2,500 years. On the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Babylonian Jewry produced many of Judaism's holiest books and thrived for two millenniums. In the great synagogues and libraries of Cairo, Jews preserved the intellectual and scientific treasures of antiquity into the Renaissance. From Aleppo to Aden to Alexandria, Jews stood out as some of the greatest artists, musicians, businessmen, and writers. All those communities were wiped out. Age-old family businesses and properties were confiscated. Jewish quarters were destroyed. Pogroms left synagogues looted, graveyards desecrated and thousands dead.

The pages that the United Nations has written about the Palestinian refugees could fill up soccer stadiums, but not a drop of ink has been spilled about the Jewish refugees. Out of over 1,088 United Nations resolutions on the Middle East, one will not find a single syllable regarding the displacement of Jewish refugees. There have been more than 172 resolutions exclusively devoted to Palestinian refugees, but not one dedicated to Jewish refugees. The Palestinian refugees have their own United Nations agency, their own information programme, and their own department within the United Nations. None exists for the Jewish refugees. The expression "double standard" does not even begin to describe that gap. That discrepancy is very convenient for some in this Chamber, but it is not right.

The time has come for the United Nations to end its complicity in trying to erase the stories of 850,000 people from history. The time has also come to speak openly in these halls about the Arab world's role in maintaining the Palestinians as refugees for more than six decades. Jews from Arab countries came to refugee camps in Israel, which eventually gave birth to thriving towns and cities. Refugee camps in Arab countries gave birth to more Palestinian refugees. Israel welcomed its Jewish refugees with citizenship and unlocked their vast potential. As they rose to the highest levels of society, our refugees lifted the State of Israel to new heights.

Let us imagine if Arab countries had done the same with their Palestinian refugees. Instead, they have cynically perpetuated their status as refugees, generation after generation. Across the Arab world, Palestinians have been denied citizenship, rights and opportunities. Those are facts that must be neither forgotten nor overlooked as we look to moving forward on the path to peace.

I have saved the most obvious myth for last — the myth that peace between Israelis and Palestinians can somehow be achieved by bypassing direct negotiations. History has shown that peace and negotiations are inseparable. Direct negotiations are the only tool, the only way and the only path to creating two States for two peoples. Last January in Amman, Israel offered a clear proposal for restarting direct negotiations. We presented the Palestinian delegation with negotiating positions on every major issue separating the parties.

That proposal, filled with Israel's vision for peace, continues to gather dust as Palestinian leaders continue to pile up new pre-conditions for sitting down with Israel. They are everywhere except at the negotiating table. It is time for them to give up unilateral efforts to internationalize the conflict and to take up the real path to peace.

This week, we will observe the two most significant public holidays in Israel: our Day of Remembrance and our Day of Independence. On Wednesday, sirens will sound across Israel. For two minutes, everything will come to a halt. People will stop in their tracks, cars will pull over to the side of highways, and the entire country will pause to remember the more than 22,000 Israelis who have been

killed by wars and terrorism in our nation's short history in our region.

On Thursday, we will celebrate the rebirth of the Jewish nation and our 64 years as a free people in our ancient homeland. Against persistent threats and overwhelming odds, Israel has not only survived but thrived. I walk the halls of the Organization tall and proud of my extraordinary nation of just 7 million people, which has produced 10 Nobel Prize laureates, sends satellites up into space, puts electric cars on the road and develops the technology needed to run everything from cell phones to solar panels to medical devices.

We intentionally commemorate these two days one after the other. As we, the Israeli people, celebrate our independence, we carry the heavy weight of great sacrifice and suffering. The lesson we take from these days is clear. We can never turn a blind eye to the dangers around us. We cannot pretend that we live in a stable region filled with Jeffersonian democracies. But there is another lesson that will fill the hearts of Israelis this week. We can never, ever give up the hope of lasting peace. The price of conflict is too high. The evil of war is too great. That is the fundamental truth that guides our leaders.

In the dangerous uncertainty of a turbulent Middle East, the Security Council has never had a greater responsibility to separate myth from truth and fact from fiction. The clarity of candour has never been more valuable. The need for honest disclosure has never been clearer. It is time for the Council to sweep out the cobwebs of old illusions and to plant the seeds for a truly open debate on the Middle East. The challenges before us demand nothing less.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

The Council's consideration today of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, once more gives our delegations an opportunity to address the events that are unfolding in that region, events that elicit more fears than hopes, despite the efforts of the United Nations and the international community. We will limit our remarks in this debate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situations in Yemen and Syria.

With regard to Syria, while we can welcome the fact that in the space of a week the Security Council has succeeded in adopting two resolutions (2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012)), on sending a supervision mission to that country, that does not make the situation on the ground any less precarious. Togo remains concerned by the fact that the parties' declarations of good intentions are not always followed by actions that reflect respect for the commitments they have made, in this case to implementing the six-point plan of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Council is nonetheless doing all it can to get them to do so and to throw all its weight behind a settlement of this crisis, which has, unfortunately, left thousands dead, destroyed major parts of the country's infrastructure and imperilled national unity. The establishment, two days ago through resolution 2043 (2012) of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), is manifest proof of those efforts. In the final analysis, we continue to hope that the presence of observers on the ground will promote the speedy implementation of the Joint Special Envoy's proposals, even if we see violations of the ceasefire every day. Togo once again urges every element of the Syrian Government and opposition to work to bring an end to the violence and to agree to sit down at the negotiation table in order to map out together a new future for their country with the international community's support. We believe that Mr. Annan's mission offers Syria a unique opportunity to return to peace. We urge the country's political class to work to that end.

On the question of Yemen, we are pleased to note that the situation there has seen a period of calm since the holding on 21 February of the presidential election. The success of that election is a credit to the Yemeni people and a genuine sign of their willingness to end the crisis situation that prevailed there and to work towards finding peace in a fraternal and inclusive spirit.

While in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2012/8) of 29 March the Security Council expressed its concern at the deterioration in cooperation between the political

actors in the country and about the dangers that poses for transition, it is nonetheless encouraging to note that a month later the country has seen no major regrettable developments. Togo welcomes this situation and urges the Yemeni people to spare no effort in committing their country to the road to peace, security and prosperity.

My country also encourages the new leaders to work together with the opposition and representatives of the various interest groups to bring peace to the country. In that context, the international community and the United Nations should continue to support the legitimate authorities in their fight against the armed terrorist groups that are proliferating in several regions of Yemen and that threaten the country's unity and territorial integrity.

Such support is all the more urgent in view of the fact that famine and malnutrition continue to ravage the country. Given that food insecurity, Togo can only encourage the humanitarian organizations that are already aiding those who are most helpless in the face of the conditions of insecurity that obtain in the country to continue their work, and to invite countries that possess the means and capacity to support that work in the most appropriate manner possible. My country also believes that it is imperative that the international community help the Government of Yemen to initiate projects aimed at helping young people in order to ensure that this important segment of the population does not fall into despair, violence or the quest for easy money.

Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we are compelled to conclude that there has been no significant progress made in several months. The only positive note on the military front last month was the ceasefire agreement between the Islamic Jihad and Israel that halted the cycle of violence in the Gaza Strip. On the political front, after the suspension of the series of direct meetings between Israel and Palestine begun last January under Jordan's auspices, it is encouraging to note that the two parties have once more committed to returning to negotiations. The new exploratory meeting of the two countries' authorities, held in Amman on 4 April after the January discussions had produced no concrete results, is also evidence of Jordan's continued efforts to relaunch the negotiations that, as if we needed reminding, have been deadlocked since September 2010.

Furthermore, the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Quartet and the Secretary-General, which took place on 11 April in Washington, D.C., in the presence of Special Envoy Tony Blair and Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nasser Judeh, is also an example of this willingness to restart direct talks between the two parties. Togo believes that the Quartet should put pressure on the parties to return to direct negotiations so that the issues that separate them can be resolved in favour of a definitive settlement of the conflict.

Peace in the Middle East depends on a resolution of the Palestinian question. The international community should continue to work unflaggingly to seek appropriate solutions to the conflict and to support every initiative made in that direction. My country, which maintains good relations with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, encourages both to commit intensely to direct negotiations, which are the only route, ultimately, to the creation of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel within clearly defined and internationally recognized borders. Togo also calls on the entire Palestinian political class, and in particular the most radical groups, to transcend their rigid positions and to work together towards direct negotiations with the State of Israel.

After several decades of conflict that have left thousands dead on both sides, it is disturbing to note that the time for peace is being perpetually and indefinitely postponed. The United Nations and the international community have the heavy responsibility of working towards that peace between Palestine and Israel, and, beyond that, throughout the Middle East. However, they cannot reach that goal unless all parties directly concerned commit to working in good faith to promote peace and security for their peoples and the nations of the region.

Mr. Cabral (Portugal): At the outset, I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his very thorough briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

Over the past year, Palestinians have watched the international community lend its full support to the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of their brethren

in several Arab countries, while daily life in the occupied Palestinian territory has become increasingly harsh under Israel's continued and reinforced occupation 20 years on from Oslo. We cannot stress enough the urgency of solving the Palestinian question, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, through the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State on the basis of the internationally endorsed parameters.

In the light of that, Portugal welcomes the initiative by President Abbas to send a letter to the Prime Minister of Israel as a demonstration of his goodwill and commitment to a just, peaceful and negotiated settlement. We look forward to Prime Minister Netanyahu's response and hope that that exchange of letters will foster an environment conducive to the swift resumption of direct talks between the parties based on the 23 September Quartet statement (see SG/2178). We welcome the Quartet's 11 April renewed call to the parties to meet those objectives (see SG/2182).

Portugal has always stood firmly behind the efforts of the Quartet. We also very much agree that all core issues can only be finally settled through direct negotiations. We continue to believe that the 23 September Quartet statement can provide an adequate framework for discussions on all core issues with a view to achieving a final settlement within a strict time frame. We also very much appreciate Jordan's efforts in that regard. For those efforts to succeed, the parties must commit seriously to negotiations, show good faith and refrain from provocative actions that undermine confidence in each other and in the negotiation process.

We regret that Israel continues blatantly to ignore and defy all pleas that it fulfil its obligations. We once again urge the Israeli authorities to immediately cease all settlement activity, demolitions and evictions in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. As they are well aware, all those actions are illegal under international law. Furthermore, they are quickly rendering physically impossible any peaceful agreement based on a two-State solution.

We strongly condemn the approval of the new construction in a range of settlements, as well as the recent evictions of Palestinian families, including refugees, from their homes in Beit Hanina, for the purpose of paving the way for the first Jewish residential presence and a new settlement in the midst of yet another traditional Palestinian neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

We welcome the decision by the Israeli Supreme Court sustaining the dismantlement of the Migron outpost by 1 August and the evacuation of the Ulpana neighbourhood in the settlement of Beit El by 1 May. We hope that the Israeli Government will abide fully by the Supreme Court's rulings. We also expect it to cease all plans and attempts to retroactively legalize outposts. Under international law, all settlement activity is illegal, including outposts, as is Israel's appropriation of occupied territory, regardless of whether it is private or public.

In Gaza the situation remains one of grave concern and, despite some welcome progress, Israel needs to do much more to enable the reconstruction of destroyed and damaged infrastructure and promote the economic recovery of Gaza's economy. The situation in and around the Gaza Strip remains fragile and unsustainable. All parties must refrain from actions that exacerbate tensions and threaten calm and security. For its part, Hamas, as the de facto authority in Gaza, must end all rocket attacks against Israel, which we vehemently condemn. As for Israel, it must be understood that its unquestionable right to security cannot come at the cost of unnecessary human suffering in Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority has worked diligently to prepare for statehood. Just last month, the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund reconfirmed for the third year in a row the State-readiness of the Palestinian institutions and stressed the need to sustain and build upon the Palestinian Authority's important institution-building efforts. To that end, urgent efforts, mainly by Israel, are needed to reverse the economic and fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians must have access to their resources, including in Area C, and to export markets. The clearance review mechanism must become more efficient and transparent and must ensure the reliable and predictable transfer of revenues to the Palestinian Authority. We hope that such concrete advances will soon materialize, and we recall that each and every one of those requirements constitutes an international obligation Israel has long subscribed to.

Another key aspect of a sustainable peaceful settlement to the conflict is that of Israel's security,

which is a matter that Palestinians, Israel's neighbours and the international community must seriously commit to, including through international mechanisms. One thing is certain — the only way to ensure Israel's long-term security is to end the occupation, settle all core issues and claims between Palestinians and Israelis and fully normalize diplomatic, political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world.

We recall, in that regard, the Arab Peace Initiative, which has just marked its tenth anniversary. Its premises and elements remain as valid today as they were a decade ago. We call upon Israel and the Arabs, with the support of the Quartet's efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian track, to seriously engage on the other dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The full implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative would enable Israel's integration into its regional environment, thus enabling a stable, peaceful and prosperous future for all in the Middle East.

Last Saturday, the Security Council authorized the establishment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) to monitor a cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties and to monitor and support the full implementation of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point proposal (see resolution 2043 (2012) and S/PV.6756). It did so, notwithstanding its awareness of the many risks and challenges entailed, and sent a strong and united message of support to the Joint Special Envoy and his six-point proposal, mindful of the fact that it presents a last chance for a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

We once again urge the Syrian authorities to immediately and visibly implement all their commitments under the six-point proposal and ensure the effective operation of UNSMIS. We also reiterate our calls to all parties to cease all violence in all its forms, cooperate fully with the Mission and the Joint Special Envoy and engage in a Syrian-led political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for the briefing and update that he presented today. As we come together in today's monthly debate, the Colombian delegation once again would like to express its conviction regarding the need and importance of continuing to support all those actions that could lead to the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East and contribute to dialogue and rapprochement between the parties, based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Accordingly, we back the actions of the Quartet aimed at the implementation of the 23 September 2011 plan, which highlights, as reiterated at the 12 March meeting in New York and the 11 April meeting in Washington, D.C., the significance and encouragement the Quartet finds in the fact that new plans for dialogue among the parties have been discussed, as have been ways in which those initiatives could be supported. The creation of a viable Palestinian State, living in peace side by side with Israel with clearly defined, secure and internationally recognized borders must therefore be the fruit of direct negotiations between the parties, ensuring coexistence between these two peoples.

The parties should continue in their efforts towards rapprochement, working constructively in a spirit of mutual trust, as dialogue is the only possible and effective road towards the prompt renewal of a negotiation process that ensures stable and lasting peace. We invite the representative of the Quartet to continue its active and intense work to achieve this goal.

We note progress made by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. However, we believe that more efforts should be made to preserve law and order to fight against all forms of extremism and to put an end to provocation. We are concerned over the fragile situation in Gaza. Rocket attacks launched from Gaza must stop, as they affect the security and coexistence of both peoples.

Israel for its part should take effective measures to stop the violence of the settlers, including efforts to bring those responsible for those acts to justice.

My country underscores the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in the preparation of their institutions with the goal of establishing a State. We back the actions of the international community aimed at bolstering capacity-building of Palestinian authorities to ensure the viability of an independent and sovereign State that provides for the well-being of its people.

We believe that, in order to attain a lasting peace, the parties should abstain from unilateral measures that go against international law, harm civilians or endanger

them. The international community, for its part, should ensure that the parties take effective measures that ensure respect for and enjoyment of human rights and the fundamental freedoms of the population.

Regarding the situation in Syria, it is clear that violence in all its forms and repression have not come to an end. There are still attacks and incidents that are violations of the 12 April ceasefire. Colombia voted in favour of the establishment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, which contributes to additional efforts on the part of the Security Council. We believe that the second unanimous decision by the Security Council shows the Council's firm determination to resolve the crisis in Syria through the full support for and implementation of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan, that is to say, the plan of Mr. Kofi Annan.

As I said when the Council adopted resolution 2043 (2012), we hope that an expanded presence on the ground will enable constant supervision and evaluation of the compliance with the six-point plan, to which the Syrian Government opposition have committed. The Secretary-General should inform the Council on any obstacle hindering the effective discharge of the UNSMIS mandate.

My delegation believes that the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan is the ideal response in that it seeks to put an immediate end to the violence, ensure humanitarian access and facilitate a political transition, led by Syria itself, towards a democratic and pluralistic political system, through the creation of the conditions needed to initiate a broad political dialogue between the Syrian Government and the full spectrum of the Syrian opposition.

The efforts of the Joint Special Envoy are fully worthy of our backing and appreciation. It is crucial that the Council and the Joint Special Envoy work together. We must maintain an attitude marked by cautious optimism, given the precariousness of the situation, and we must also hope that the positive signs can be consolidated. We must continue to urge the Syrian authorities and the opposition to abide by the ceasefire, so that it will be possible to work within the framework of a political dialogue.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The widespread transformational processes taking place in the Middle East region in no way diminish the fundamental importance of the issues of a Palestinian-Israeli, and in general an Arab-Israeli, settlement. Unless these issues are resolved, it will remain impossible to imagine any dramatic improvement in the situation in the Middle East.

In that regard, one cannot overstate the risks of what has been seen of late, namely, a flagging in the attention paid to the theme on the international and regional levels, particularly in a situation when on the ground we can see the deliberate creation of new realities and the pursuit of policies based on fait accompli. It is clear that there has been an inexorable radicalization of approaches, which could lead to an ever-growing spiral of violence from both sides. That is unacceptable.

The situation can be tangibly defused only by the resumption of a direct dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, their fundamental positions to date do not converge. A serious step towards the resumption of genuine talks is offered by the exchange of letters between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

It is important that the Palestinian leader has once again expressed his commitment to the principle of two States and his readiness to carry out substantive talks on a universally recognized internationally legal basis. We expect a responsible reaction from Israel. The negotiation process requires robust international accompaniment. A positive element in that regard is the continuation of painstaking regular work of the Quartet.

It is important that its statements, including the latest on the outcome of the ministerial meeting in Washington, D.C., of 11 April, firmly calls on the sides to meet their obligations under the Road Map, to avoid actions that might undermine confidence and to focus on positive efforts that could strengthen and improve the climate for resuming direct talks on the basis of the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011.

In that context, the Quartet has supported the implementation of a range of important socio-economic programmes in the occupied territories and the establishment of a smoothly operating mechanism by which the Israelis can transfer customs and tax fees owed to the Palestinians.

A particular role in accompaniment of the Middle East peace process is by regional players as well, above all Jordan and Egypt. The League of Arab States

has been enhancing its influence on developments, and it is reassuring that the theme of the Middle East was given priority in the decisions taken at the summit of the League in Baghdad on 29 March, which clearly laid out the interdependence of all tracks related to the Middle East settlement, including the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanon.

It is important to make the most effective possible use of that useful regional leverage, particularly in efforts to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation, without which it is impossible to conceive of any prospects for a sustainable settlement.

Russia is also making its own contributions in that area. There is a plan to hold a second intra-Palestinian meeting in Moscow in mid-May, during which we intend to continue work to encourage Hamas and Fatah to achieve national reconciliation, based on the Doha Agreements. The stalemate in the Middle East peace process calls for active actions from the Security Council as well. In that regard, we would like to recall that the idea of sending to the region a mission of the Council continues to be relevant.

If implemented, that would be a timely and effective step on the part of the Council and would serve as a stimulus for the parties to narrow their differences and resume substantive talks on the universally recognized international legal basis, including the well-known resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations, the Madrid Principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

An indicator that the Security Council can constructively work on the complex Middle East situations is the unanimous adoption of resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) on the development of a United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria. We anticipate that its activities will contribute to restoring peace and calm and to launching an inclusive Syrian-led political process without interference from outside in Syria, a country that plays a key role in regional affairs.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate your having organized this session, Madam President, and we thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his opening remarks. We also thank the representative of Israel and the observer of Palestine for their statements.

Given that the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, is a topic on our agenda each month, one could argue that it is becoming increasingly difficult to say something original by comparison to what was said in the preceding meeting or the one before that. On the other hand, the landscape has evolved so rapidly in the past few years and with such conflicting trends and manifestations that we have come to accept that we are justified in frequently revisiting this topic. The fact that we have met on two occasions over the weekend in the past 10 days to consider the case of Syria is proof of that.

Indeed, Syria is very much on our minds when we consider the Middle East today. But of course, we cannot consider that country in an isolated manner. The so-called Arab Spring, which is looking ever less like the image of spring, has revealed the tendency for events in any single country to rapidly spill over to its neighbours. It has also shown its capacity to divide the international community and even the League of Arab States, not only on the interpretation of events, but also on how to react to situations that clearly threaten to spin out of control.

In a way, the reality in the Middle East today surpasses any possible attempt at fiction. It includes several ingredients: grassroots movements rebelling against authoritarian Governments in the old mold, while the latter use methods of repression that are vestiges of the past; the threat of ancestral rivalries of an ethnic or religious nature that not only run counter to contemporary values such as tolerance, coexistence and solidarity, but also have the potential to rapidly spread throughout the region; and, on the positive side, the awakening of the League of Arab States, which assessed early on the importance of what was at stake and found in its movement the capacity to respond — albeit weakly — to the challenge. When we add to these elements the often sidelined demand of the Palestinian people for a homeland and the spectre of a new danger in the region in the near future with the possible introduction of weapons of mass destruction, the potentially explosive nature of events in that part of the world can be clearly understood.

Who could doubt that these are tangible threats to international peace and security? Who could doubt that this matter falls under the mandate of the Council? And who could doubt that the complex landscape also offers multiple opportunities for the Council to exercise that mandate in a positive manner, contributing, together

with the stakeholders in the region, to finding ways to overcome the crises — including through the two-State solution, leading to the creation of the State of Palestine — and achieving the vision of a more prosperous, more democratic and more inclusive region, free of the current serious tensions that afflict it?

Naturally, neither my delegation nor, I suspect, any delegation sitting around this table has holistic solutions to address such deeply rooted tensions in a highly heterogeneous region where each country is a special case. However, united, and in particular by partnering with the League of Arab States, we can make our small contribution to, first, ensuring that the existing crises do not blow up in our faces, and, secondly, offering ideas and perhaps concrete mechanisms that will assist the countries directly involved in finding their own way.

Guatemala has presented its detailed position on the various subjects related to the Middle East: the situation between Israel and Palestine, the situation between Israel and its other neighbours, the situation in Lebanon, and the situation in half a dozen other sovereign States. It is unnecessary to repeat our specific position on each of these matters on every occasion. That is why we have focused our remarks today along more general lines. However, I conclude by reaffirming what I said at the beginning. We accept that the agenda item of the situation in the Middle East clearly justifies our constant follow-up.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): Allow me to commence by expressing our gratitude to the United States for having organized this open debate on the situation the Middle East. I take this opportunity to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The situation in the Middle East demands constant international attention and in-depth participation in addressing the perennial problems and challenges that engulf it. As a highly complex region in many respects, including in terms of geography, geopolitics, ethnic intermingling and simmering ethno-national conflicts, the Middle East has remained at the hub of the international agenda for decades.

The wave of changes that have swept the region since the spring of 2011 have become yet another potent factor that has absorbed international attention and portended the desire of Middle Eastern societies for political and societal transformation processes encapsulating the ideas of democracy, equal representation, greater freedom and wider political participation.

We all agree on the potential benefits to be brought about by the process of democratic transition in the Middle Eastern countries. However, one should not dismiss the idea that every transition is accompanied by hardships and trials. Therefore, patience, diligence, resolve and political dexterity will be the best tools in making the democratic transformation process as smooth as possible and in excluding erroneous judgments and policies regarding the region's prospective development.

Turning to more specific issues, we would like to note the progress in the Middle East peace process that was demonstrated by the recent interactions between the Israeli and Palestinian sides on 17 April in Jerusalem, after a prolonged hiatus in peace negotiations. In this respect, we would like to welcome the exchange of letters between the parties initiated on this very date, and express the hope that the sides will avail themselves of this positive momentum for resuming negotiations.

In this respect, Azerbaijan appreciates the consistent efforts of Jordan to revive the dialogue and resume the negotiations. We would also like to note the importance of the Quartet meeting held in Washington, D.C., on 11 April, in keeping the Middle East peace process high on the international agenda, and express our hope that our collective efforts will finally lead to the resolution of this lingering conflict.

Among a number of political, humanitarian and security challenges, we cannot but express again our deep concern about continued illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Needless to say, apart from their impact on the rights, freedoms and everyday lives of Palestinians, settlements cause serious damage to the peace process and, more dangerously, threaten a two-State solution and the emergence of a viable Palestinian State.

The situation involving the serious violation of international humanitarian and human rights law cannot go unheeded by the Security Council. In performing its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, the Council must react

adequately in order to put an end to illegal practices and policies and ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected. It is also important to take full advantage of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity by promoting intercommunal dialogue and reconciliation while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic and religious intolerance.

The situation in Syria still occupies the top position on the list of international security issues. We are encouraged by the fact that, as a result of the tireless efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria, Mr. Kofi Annan, the sides concerned have committed to ending the bloodshed and observing a ceasefire after lasting violent clashes. Needless to say, reports testifying to sporadic violations of the ceasefire are worrisome, but we still believe that such instances will remain isolated cases without further spillover to threaten the current fragile trust.

The adoption of the resolutions authorizing the dispatch of the advance team to Syria (resolution 2042 (2012)) and, later, of the deployment of the full United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (resolution 2043 (2012)) was an expression of a unified Security Council position on this highly crucial matter. Hopes are high that the security environment in Syria will be propitious enough for the Mission to carry out its task of monitoring and supporting the full implementation of the Special Envoy's six-point proposal.

In conclusion, we would like to voice the hope that, with more political will, rigorous work and concerted efforts, peace and security will no longer be rare commodities in the Middle East.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing today on developments in the Middle East, which we can all agree are explosive and dangerous to the security and stability of that sensitive zone of the world. His briefing highlighted the need for the Council to shoulder its responsibility to salvage peace in the region and the added value of its visit to the occupied Palestinian territories.

Settlement building is the most serious threat to the entire peace process. The most recent development in that regard was the decision taken by the Israeli Government in the first week of this month to build more than 1,000 housing units in the occupied territories. In that connection, representatives of the Quartet, meeting in Washington, D.C., this month, expressed concern at the settlement activity, settler provocations and continued violence, and called on the two parties to make efforts to resume negotiations in order to find a solution to the conflict. They also called on the international community to support and assist the Palestinian authorities in overcoming the financial crisis resulting from Israeli practices.

In that regard, the Human Rights Council has authorized a fact-finding mission on the impact of settlements on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. East Jerusalem is the main target of the Israeli authorities' settlement policy of obliterating its features and altering its demographic, religious and cultural composition. The policy is implemented by pressuring the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem to emigrate by constructing bypass roads, settling Israelis in their confiscated homes and expanding settlements, all in order to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territories.

In that connection, I wish to quote a letter sent by His Majesty King Mohammed VI on 3 April, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, to the five permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet. His Majesty wrote:

> "All such unilateral illegal actions and other violations of the rights of the Palestinian people run counter to international law and international humanitarian law. This scheme will increase tension in the occupied Palestinian territories and have further repercussions that will endanger the entire region."

His Majesty urges the Secretary-General and the five permanent members of the Council to take every measure to compel Israel to cease its actions and practices that run counter to international agreements and instruments. The Palestinians have demonstrated time and again that they are committed to negotiations and the peace process to end the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The recent summit of the League of Arab States, held in Bagdad in March, reaffirmed that fair and comprehensive peace is the strategic option under the Arab Peace Initiative, as affirmed at various Arab summits since 2002. Accordingly, we believe that the

initiative taken by President Abbas to write to Prime Minister Netanyahu on the revival of the negotiation process, which has been in limbo for years, will serve to revive the peace process and to enable the Palestinians to establish their independent and viable State on the Palestinian territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In this context, we encourage the Palestinian parties to embark on the path to reconciliation in order to end division, in accordance with the Doha Declaration.

The economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is deteriorating rapidly under Israeli occupation. In a recent report, the World Bank sounded the alarm that the Palestinian budget deficit is more than $1 billion. The situation of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including peaceful activists and activists, is precarious. They endure isolation and arbitrary detention and are prevented from seeing their families and from continuing their educations.

Arab leaders have endorsed the resolution adopted by the Arab League on 23 September 2011, to support the inclusion of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations, along the 4 June 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. Palestine's membership, which would be in line with the vision of President Obama to achieve peace based on the two-State solution, is notable in particular given that most countries in the world have recognized the State of Palestine on the basis of reports by international organizations that Palestinian authorities and institutions are capable of administering the affairs of an independent Palestinian State.

At the same time, we call for the implementation of the relevant international resolutions, instruments and initiatives regarding a solution to the Palestinian question. We also call on Israeli to withdraw from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the occupied Golan and the remaining Lebanese territories. We believe that establishing a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East is the only way to guarantee security, stability and prosperity in the entire Middle East.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): South Africa expresses its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing to the Council. We also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The past 18 months have seen dramatic developments in North Africa and the Middle East. Those developments have been brought about by the unwavering will of people to demand their legitimate rights. What is clear from what we have witnessed is that the status quo that has allowed the rights of people to remain unfulfilled for decades cannot continue.

In that light, the longstanding Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be resolved. We cannot have a six-decade-long conflict continue and allow generations of people from both sides to be denied the opportunity to live in peace and security and within internationally recognized, secure borders.

South Africa remains disappointed that, since 23 September 2011, when the Quartet committed itself to assist the parties to make progress in the peace process, tangible progress is yet to be registered. Instead, despite commendable efforts by some important stakeholders, such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, there has been stagnation on the political track. Additionally, the security and humanitarian situation has worsened, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The most dramatic negative development has been the continued building of illegal settlements by Israel, which undermines the very foundation of a viable, independent Palestinian State to exist alongside the State of Israel.

We note the statement issued by the Middle East Quartet in Washington, D.C. on 11 April (see SG/2182). While we appreciate the efforts of the Quartet to revive the political process and assist the Palestinians with their institution-building efforts, we once again raise the questions that we asked in the Chamber at our debate three months ago (see S/PV.6706). Is it not time to assess the effectiveness of the Quartet model? What more can the Security Council do to help the parties resume negotiations and find lasting peace?

The Quartet continues to meet periodically, yet it has not shown the political will to follow through on its decisions. Its road map, which is almost 10 years old, has not been complied with, nor has its most recent request for the parties to begin direct negotiations

immediately and without preconditions, or the submission of proposals on borders and security.

The role of the Security Council in addressing this matter should be reinvigorated. The Council is responsible for international peace and security, and it cannot absolve itself of responsibility on this crucial matter. Ignoring this conflict affects the Council's credibility. My delegation believes that a visit to the region by the Council would be beneficial.

Additionally, we should consider the views of relevant regional organizations on this matter. The international community has been willing to take into account the views of relevant regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States (LAS), in other conflicts in the region. In that vein, the views of the LAS should also be taken into account in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has directly affected so many of its members.

We commend Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for having taken the initiative to write to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, in an attempt to resume credible negotiations. If the opportunity for restarting credible, direct negotiations is not seized, the viability of a two-State solution will slowly fade away.

What is of concern, however, is that despite attempts to resuscitate the negotiations, the prospect for direct talks seems low, as the Israeli Government continues with its actions that militate against a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Aside from the ongoing illegal settlement construction, it persists with home demolitions, illegal excavations of religious sites and restrictions on access and movement on the Palestinian people, while also maintaining its hold on Gaza and not preventing settlers from attacking Palestinian persons and their property.

In January, the Council was able to agree to receive a briefing from Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos on the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which served as confirmation of the deteriorating situation in all of its respects. Since then, the situation has not improved. We look forward to receiving further briefings from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regarding the situation.

The recent escalation of tensions in Gaza is of particular concern. Its impact on the children of both sides should be underscored. On 12 March, UNICEF issued a statement in which it expressed deep concern about the impact on children of the recent escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and Israel. A rocket fired into Israel last month hit a school, which, fortunately, was empty. The Israeli attacks into Gaza have left some children not as fortunate. UNICEF has reported on the death and injury of Palestinian children as a result of those attacks. It has stated that, over the past year, 20 Palestinian and 5 Israeli children were killed, and another 448 Palestinian and 2 Israeli children were injured because of the fighting.

As the Council has shown commitment in addressing issues related to children in armed conflict, perhaps we should consider including that matter on the agenda of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict.

Finally, regarding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, South Africa welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2043 (2012) by the Council, providing for the deployment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). We urge all sides to ensure the effective operation of UNSMIS by facilitating its work and guaranteeing the safety of its personnel.

We welcome the news that the advance team has been able to visit key hotspots of the conflict, including Homs, and that they have observed calm and a halt to major hostilities. The deployment of the advance team has already proved to be a calming influence, as violence has decreased during their presence. That marked decrease in violence should now be sustained.

The deployment of UNSMIS will be important to ensure that the six-point proposal of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan is implemented, and will likewise play a crucial role with regard to the goal of ensuring that all sides commit to a peaceful dialogue in order to promote an all-inclusive process of negotiations that leads to a political outcome that responds to the legitimate aspirations of all Syrian people.

It is equally important that all members of the international community give the resolution and the Annan proposal the chance to succeed, and uphold and respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the current developments in the Arab world undoubtedly have a bearing on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. In attempting to resolve and address the challenges in the Middle East, we should not lose sight of our efforts aimed at a holistic resolution to the Middle East crisis, including the Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements. France associates itself with the statement to be made by the head of the European Union delegation.

With respect to the peace process, the reports are disappointing. The current stalemate in the process daily jeopardizes the two-State solution, while supported by the international community, owing to the accelerated pace of Israeli settlements, which threatens the viability of a Palestinian State. Morally and politically unacceptable and rooted in plunder and violence, settlement is a basic violation of international law. In that context, we condemned the provocations represented by the issue of new calls for offers for the construction of more than 1,100 homes by the Israeli authorities. Moreover, the settlers, perpetrators of unacceptable violence against the Palestinian people, should be held accountable for their acts before the law, which happens only too rarely.

It is therefore deplorable that the Council has not condemned such actions and that it simply states the law and recalls the principles that underpin the two-State solution when that finds itself threatened. That is the case today, which concerns an increasing number of Palestinians and Israelis.

Doing nothing also risks an outburst of regional violence, which further fuels tension. These past three months, Israel has been the target of a great number of rocket attacks. We condemn them unreservedly. In Gaza, a radical political change on the part of Israel is needed in order to lift the blockade, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), without compromising Israel's security interests, and to put an end to Hamas' control of the population of Gaza.

France truly believes that the meeting of a Palestinian delegation with the Israeli Prime Minister is a step in the right direction. We hope that that exchange will facilitate a renewal of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. The aim remains the relaunching of effective negotiations on the basis of clear and balanced parameters.

However, we cannot avoid in-depth reflection on how the international community can support the peace process, which is not satisfactory today. Only a follow-up mechanism that includes all actors involved, in particular the regional players, on the basis of agreed parameters and a realistic time frame, to which the parties are accountable for their acts, will enable the parties to return to the path of credible negotiations. Such an observation does not release the parties from their responsibilities, but is to draw lessons from their inability to themselves undertake the path of painful compromise, which will be difficult for both parties, as well as to encourage the only realistic path towards a vanishing solution.

Substantive confidence-building measures must be introduced in order to restore the necessary trust between the two parties. Actors critical to the peace, namely, the Palestinian Authority and its President, Mr. Abbas, must be supported.

The recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee reaffirmed that the Palestinians are ready to establish their State and to administer it credibly. It also underscored the untenable financial position of the Palestinian Authority, which may no longer be able to pay its civil servants' salaries if donors do not mobilize. Moreover, Israel must implement the summer 2011 technical agreement in order to improve the collection of duties and taxes due to the Palestinian Authority, which is the best way to raise Palestinian revenue. Israel must remove constraints imposed on Palestinian economic development, in particular in Area C and Gaza, which help to maintain the dependant Palestinian economy.

Supporting President Abbas in his undertaking for Palestinian reconciliation is also crucial as there can be no lasting solution while the Palestinian territories remain divided. We are ready to work with any Palestinian Government that commits to non-violence and a two-State solution and that accepts the agreements and obligations reached under the Palestine Liberation Organization, including Israel's right to exist.

Allow me to touch on the position in Syria. The situation on the ground continues to give rise to the

greatest concern. As last Thursday's letter of the Secretary-General to the Council (S/2012/238) spells out, Damascus has once again failed to meet its commitments. The areas of Homs and Idlib, still subject to bombings and attacks since last week, are still paying a heavy price for the ongoing repression. The Syrian authorities have not implemented the immediate measures to which they committed with the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian Crisis. The Syrian army has only misled us in terms of its withdrawal. The heavy-weapons fire and the bombings continue.

In adopting resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), the Council demanded Damascus immediately and verifiably implement such measures to end the violence. Damascus can no longer defy a decision of the international community.

The Council has shouldered its responsibilities by accepting the Secretary-General's request to deploy an observer mission of 300 persons to monitor the end to all violence by all parties and the full implementation of the six-point proposal of the Joint Special Envoy. Such deployment is not without risk. No obstruction of the observers' work and no threat to their security will be tolerated by the Council, which, if necessary, should consider coercive measures if called for.

The Council's power to help resolve crises is also a condition of the credibility of its action to maintain regional stability. The Council therefore cannot accept violations of the sovereignty of Syria's neighbouring countries, namely, Turkey and Lebanon. France would like to express its appreciation of the welcome provided by those two States to Syrian citizens seeking refuge far from the violence, in accordance with the relevant international law on refugees and displaced persons. In such a fragile regional context, we welcome the commitment of the Lebanese authorities to working with all parts of society to preserve Lebanon's stability. We commend their commitment to meeting all their international obligations, including with respect to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The Council must stand ready to respond resolutely if the requirements of resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012) are not met by the Damascus authorities. However, the urgency of acting in Syria should not allow the international community to overlook the need to preserve the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace. The Middle East will achieve long-term stability only if the international community can meet the legitimate aspirations voiced in Palestine for a State and in Israel for its security. It is a matter of the Council's credibility in helping the emergence of a credible framework for negotiations in that regard.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. I have also listened carefully to the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The situation in the Middle East remains complex and fragile. The peace process is still at an impasse, which is very worrisome and disconcerting. The Israeli-Palestinian issue remains at the centre of the Middle East process and therefore requires the ongoing attention and assistance of the international community. China has always advocated the settling of disputes between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of Land for Peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Middle East Road Map and other agreements with a view to ultimately establishing an independent State of Palestine living in peace side by side with Israel.

China welcomes and supports every effort to overcome the impasse in the talks and in restarting negotiations. We welcome the recent efforts made by both Israel and Palestine to resume the peace talks at an early date, which we hope will soon yield positive results.

China hopes that the Quartet will continue to contribute to the peace talks between Israel and Palestine. China believes that the Security Council should play a greater role in the resolution of the question of the Middle East.

Israel's settlement activities represent the main obstacle to the resumption of peace talks. China has consistently opposed Israel's construction of Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian territories. We urge Israel to cease immediately its settlement activities and to cooperate with international efforts towards peace, so as to create conditions conducive to the resumption of peace talks.

At present, the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, including the Gaza Strip, remains grave. The relevant United Nations resolutions must be implemented. We hope that Israel

will lift completely its blockade against the Gaza Strip, so that the people of Gaza can resume their normal lives in conditions of dignity, with space for development. The international community must provide greater assistance and support to the Palestinian people.

The talks on the Syria-Israel track and on the Lebanon-Israel track represent an important and integral part of the Middle East peace process. A comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question is indissociable from progress on those two tracks. China fully supports the just aspirations of Syria and Lebanon to safeguard their national sovereignty and territorial integrity and to recover their occupied territories.

China supports the Arab States' strategic choice to seek a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. China is in favour of the Security Council's playing a greater role in advancing the Middle East peace process. China is ready to continue to play a constructive role in seeking the early realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

It is China's consistent view that the crisis in Syria can be settled only through a Syrian-led political process on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and for the choices and will of the Syrian people. We call upon all factions in Syria and on the international community to cooperate with and support the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Annan, to fully implement the six-point plan.

Mr. Tarar (Pakistan): I wish to thank you, Madam President, for having convened today's debate.

We align ourselves with the statements to be delivered by the Permanent Representatives of Egypt and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

Pakistan continues to support the inalienable right to self-determination of the people of Palestine. The continued denial of that right poses the risk of a conflagration in which the whole region could be embroiled.

The Security Council continues to evade its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, at the peril of its own credibility. We welcome the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council establishing an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of Israeli settlements for the rights of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

We are also encouraged to note that the Secretary-General visited the region in February, affording him the opportunity to experience first-hand the plight of a nation living under occupation in appalling conditions. It was a timely initiative that, we hope, will help to refocus the attention of the international community on this festering dispute, for the dragon's teeth are planted in the fertile soil of wrongs unrighted, of disputes left to fester for years.

Flying in the face of the international community's will, Israel continues to implement policies in defiance of international law and to work towards undermining the basis of the two-State solution. Its efforts to redraw the map of Palestine through the continuation of illegal settlement activity, the continued persecution of Palestinians and its reluctance to accept the 1967 borders as the basis for negotiations is taking the region to a state akin to a powder keg.

We reiterate that continued inaction on the part of the international community is not an option. We strongly condemn the announcement made by Israel on 4 April concerning new tenders for the construction of more than 1,100 settlement homes in East Jerusalem. Similarly, the so-called Mayor of Jerusalem has also announced plans to establish a new settlement that would effectively divide East Jerusalem. Such acts are systematically reducing the space for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State and constitute a major roadblock to peace.

Special Coordinator Robert Serry, in his briefing to the Council on 27 March 2012 (see S/PV.6742), painted a gloomy picture for prospects of restarting direct negotiations. He also said that without a road map, the State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority were also at risk.

The Middle East Quartet, which met in Washington, D.C., on 11 April 2012, has reaffirmed its commitment to all elements of its road map of 23 September 2011. However, it is disconcerting to note that its statement focuses more on the financial viability of the Palestinian Authority than on settlement

activity or providing a road map for the resumption of the peace process. It has also failed to apportion blame to Israel for actions that have stalled the peace process.

The Security Council should put its weight behind the creation of conditions conducive to restarting the peace process and holding Israel accountable for its continued defiance. We would also remind the Council that the Palestinian Authority has invited it to undertake a mission to the occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank. We will continue to engage with other members of the Council in trying to bring the visit to fruition.

While the international community continues to highlight illegal detentions in other parts of the region, more than 4,700 Palestinians languish in inhumane conditions in Israeli prisons. The international community should heed the plight of the 1,200 prisoners currently on a hunger strike to protest arbitrary detentions and force the occupying Power to mend its ways.

We once again request the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to demand the implementation of the Convention in the Palestinian territory, especially regarding Palestinian prisoners. Israel's continued blockade of Gaza is diminishing further the already nominal economic prospects for the residents of the area. We therefore once again call for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

We appreciate and strongly support the Palestinian Authority's progress in building State institutions. The paper it presented to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians entitled "Equitable development: moving forward despite the occupation" provides details of the progress made despite seemingly insurmountable odds.

Palestine has undoubtedly proved that it is ready to take its rightful place among the comity of nations. Pakistan supported its bid for UNESCO membership last year and stands committed to supporting its full United Nations membership.

Pakistan supports lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East. The broad framework for that peace is already laid down elaborately in a number of Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Political will on the part of the international community — a sine qua non for the implementation of those documents — is conspicuous by its absence. For lasting peace in the Middle East, progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel conflicts is imperative as well. We continue to insist on the full withdrawal of Israel from occupied Lebanese land and from the Syrian Golan, in compliance with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

We are concerned and disappointed that the question of the Syrian Golan, which is an integral element of the Council's consideration of this agenda item, has not found mention in the Secretariat's briefing to the Council. The region is in turmoil, and the Arab Spring cannot and will not bloom fully if the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people are not fulfilled.

Benign neglect, inaction, complicity with oppression and apathy will only discredit the advocates of peace and strengthen the narrative of extremists.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing and express appreciation for the contributions to today's debate made by the observer of Palestinian and the representative of Israel.

Before I turn to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, I would like to reiterate the United Kingdom's deep concern about the crisis in Syria, which is entering its fourteenth month. On 21 April, the Security Council, through its unanimous adoption of resolution 2043 (2012), took the important step of authorizing the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, consisting of 300 unarmed military observers, with an additional substantive civilian component. It did so despite the failure of the regime to meet its commitments under resolution 2042 (2012) and the absence of a sustained cessation of violence.

The Mission that we have authorized and Mr. Kofi Annan's six-point proposal offer the last opportunity for the Syrian regime to reverse course and allow a peaceful solution to the crisis. It is essential that the Syrian Government now meet its commitments on troop movements and heavy weapons, and ensure the conditions that will allow the Mission to operate effectively, such as unhindered freedom of movement

and access. The Council will be receiving regular and frequent reports, starting tomorrow. The failure of the regime to meet its commitments, or any attempt to hinder the work of the Mission, must be met with real and robust consequences.

Much of the international community's attention is rightly focused on the crisis in Syria, but we must not forget the ongoing plight of the Palestinian people, who have struggled for too long for their rights and dignity. Our shared goal remains a two-State solution. We all firmly believe that negotiations towards such a solution are the best way forward, and that any such negotiations should be based on the 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps, a just solution for refugees, security arrangements that respect Palestinian sovereignty and protect Israeli security, and Jerusalem as a joint capital of both States. We remain fully committed to that goal, and welcome the Quartet statement released on 11 April (see SG/2182).

Despite an almost universally shared understanding of the objective and the parameters of the solution, there remains a depressing lack of progress. With every day that passes, the very notion of the two-State solution is undermined. I have three points to make on the way forward.

First, in the immediate term, we must collectively guard against further threats to the two-State solution and act to prevent deterioration on the ground. We were therefore disappointed by the announcement on 4 April of renewed Israeli settlement activity. As the occupying Power of the Palestinian territories, the Israeli Government has an absolute requirement to uphold international law and fulfil its commitments. We and our European Union partners are clear that systematic, illegal Israeli settlement activity poses the most significant and live threat to the viability of the two-State solution. We condemn the decision to publish tenders for 872 units in the Israeli settlement of Har Homa, across the Green Line in East Jerusalem. The Israeli Government's policy is illegal under international law, counterproductive, destabilizing and provocative.

Although we welcome the difficult decision taken earlier this year by the Israeli Government to evacuate the single-house settlement of Beit HaMachpele in Hebron, what is required of the Israeli Government is of a significantly greater order of magnitude. The United Kingdom urges the Israeli Government to desist from further settlement announcements, to revoke previous announcements, and to remove — not legalize — illegal outposts from across the West Bank, as required under international law and the Road Map. If it fails to do so, it will further damage the prospects for a two-State solution and undermine the long-term security that this would deliver to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Similarly, Palestinians must also play their part in ensuring conditions conducive to a peaceful settlement. Rocket fire from Gaza — such as that which led to the crisis last month that left eight Israelis injured, 26 Palestinians dead and dozens more injured, and caused widespread disruption to normal life — must stop.

Secondly, over the longer term, we must continue our full support to the Palestinian Authority. The United Kingdom will continue to be one of the principal supporters of the Palestinians' State-building efforts, assisting them in tackling poverty, building institutions and boosting their economy. We welcome the focus of the Quartet's statement on Area C. Increasing Palestinians' autonomy in Area C and throughout the West Bank is necessary to move the Palestinian economy away from aid dependency and towards self-sustainability.

Thirdly, a sustainable solution requires a sustainable approach to Gaza. Gaza should have a thriving economy, yet it is one of the highest per capita recipients of aid in the world. Israel must ease the movement and access restrictions that make life so difficult for the people of Gaza and are doing ongoing damage to its economy. Such restrictions do not help the peace process. We understand Israel's security concerns, but if any peace deal is to be sustainable, Gaza must be economically viable.

There is no doubt that a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians would bring enormous benefits to both of them and to the region. We will continue to urge both sides to show the political leadership and courage needed to make progress towards that goal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question, during the past month. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their useful statements.

The Middle East peace process is undoubtedly passing through one of the most difficult times since the signing of the Oslo accord. The continuing stalemate in the peace process is undermining the gains made so far. In fact, dramatic developments in West Asia and North Africa since the beginning of 2011 appear to have pushed the Palestinian issue onto the back burner. Ironically, this is happening at a time when the international community is supporting the democratic aspirations of other peoples in the region.

If the present stalemate is allowed to continue and Palestinian aspirations continue to be denied, we run the risk of seeing a sharp deterioration in the situation. The lack of trust between the parties, primarily due to the intensification of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, needs to be seriously and urgently addressed. In that regard, we call for a renewed commitment on the part of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to the accepted principles for the settlement of the Palestinian issue, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Oslo accords, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet principles.

The parties should take urgent steps to recommence negotiations for realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people to having a State of their own, living side by side and at peace with Israel. In this regard, the complete cessation of settlement activities is of the utmost importance. At the same time, all violence against civilians, irrespective of its source and cause, must stop. The international community, particularly the Quartet, must redouble its efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. We hope that the meeting that took place between the Palestinian and Israeli negotiators on 17 April will facilitate their efforts towards the commencement of direct talks.

As I have said, if there is one issue that has become the major hindrance to the peace process, it is Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several reports, including those of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have clearly shown that the intensification of these activities is not compatible with the two-State solution. In fact, it is destroying the very possibility of the two-State solution. Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They have led to violence and an aggravation of tension between the Israeli settlers and the Palestinian population. We therefore reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

Indiscriminate violence not only puts the lives of civilians in real danger, it also leads to a vicious cycle of violence. We condemn all such attacks, which cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure, and call for their full cessation.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza due to the continuing blockade and restrictions on exports is constantly aggravating the livelihoods of the civilian population. As has been brought out in several reports by United Nations agencies, poverty and aid dependency have increased. Demands for emergency services, such as health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter, have overstretched the resources of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). While we welcome some steps in easing restrictions and the blockade, much more is required to be done urgently.

There is also a need to enhance the level of humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. That should be done through the established channels. At the same time, the capacity of those channels should be increased. On its part, India is continuing its development cooperation with Palestine through untied direct budgetary support — $10 million for the past two years — as well as through the training of personnel in various areas, an annual $1 million contribution to UNRWA and projects under the India-Brazil-South Africa Fund.

The formation of a unity Government and the implementation of the reconciliation agreement among Palestinian factions, signed last May, are important for strengthening the administrative and security achievements made by the Palestinian Authority in spite of several financial crises. It will not only bring all Palestinian factions together, but also ensure the establishment of a single authority for the whole of the Palestinian territories. Early action on that front will help in reaching political common ground — essential for future democratic processes in Palestine.

The Palestinian question remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The resolution of this issue should be a priority for the international community. India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and living within secure

and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

For the achievement of that dream, India will continue to support all efforts, including those of the Quartet. At the same time, for a comprehensive settlement of Arab-Israeli problems, it is also important not to lose sight of other Arab lands under Israeli occupation.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

Germany welcomes and supports the Quartet statement of 11 April (see SG/2182) in all its aspects. The statement expresses important expectations, and we call on both sides to heed the Quartet's calls. There must be an effective follow-up on the issues mentioned in the statement — first and foremost by the parties but of course also by the Quartet itself.

The Arab Spring has fundamentally changed the Arab world, with deep implications on how the rest of the world interacts with the peoples of the region. It is the result of a yearning for individual freedom, political participation and personal well-being. Those ambitions can be fulfilled only in peace and security. Progress in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is therefore key. Israel and Palestine are both an integral part of the region. Both Israelis and Palestinians want to live in freedom, dignity and security.

We understand the difficult and complex security situation in which Israel finds itself. We strongly condemn rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza and elsewhere. Germany recognizes Israel's right to protect its citizens against attacks. At the same time, we look to Israel to exercise that right judiciously.

We firmly believe that lasting security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as for the wider region, can be achieved only by taking bold steps towards peace. In that vein, it is time to return to direct negotiations now. We call on both sides to make their actions meet their declared readiness to achieve peace. Instead of looking for pretexts or excuses to evade negotiations, both parties should look for what is needed to bring about the right context of mutual trust for a resumption of direct talks. The recently initiated exchange of letters should be used in a constructive way by both sides as an opportunity to return to meaningful talks.

However, we are increasingly concerned about the physical viability of a two-State solution. Continued settlement activity threatens to undermine the fundamental conditions of a future contiguous Palestinian State by creating facts on the ground that will make final status negotiations ever more difficult. A two-State solution is the best way to achieve lasting security for Israel. We therefore took positive note of the fact that no new settlement announcements or tenders were published during the Amman talks.

However, we deplore the recent publication of tenders for more than 1,000 housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, plans to establish a new settlement in East Jerusalem and recent plans to retroactively approve outposts that were erected in contravention of Israeli law. Such approval would amount to the establishment of new settlements in the West Bank.

Our position has not changed. All settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. We call on the Israeli Government to cease all settlement activities in order to preserve the possibility of a two-State solution. The Israeli Government should leave no room for doubt as to its full commitment to negotiations and to reaching a just and fair solution to the conflict.

As pointed out by the Quartet, the social and economic development of Area C is of critical importance for the viability of a future Palestinian State. We call on both sides to cooperate in order to ensure overall progress and development in Area C, including transparent procedures for planning and building, consistent with Israel's obligations under humanitarian law.

Finally, Germany welcomes efforts by the parties to resolve outstanding issues related to tax and customs revenue collection and urges their conclusion as soon as possible. Stabilizing the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority is key to preserving an important achievement of Palestinian State-building, including in the area of security. As a major donor, Germany fully expects Israel to live up to its obligations.

Allow me now to say a few words on Syria.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2043 (2012), establishing the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, was an important, far-reaching step. The deployment of observers under the right conditions could positively influence dynamics on the ground. At the same time, we must be aware of the risks that the Mission faces. It is important that the observers have the necessary security and that they can operate freely and in the right conditions to effectively implement their mandate.

Meanwhile, the authorities in Damascus continue their attacks on the population, they continue to shell population centres with artillery and they have not withdrawn their troops and tanks to their barracks. Today, new reports about attacks in Hama are coming in. Other forms of violence continue unabated. Until now, humanitarian assistance has not reached the areas affected by the fighting. The freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully are not guaranteed. Trials before military courts against civilians for having exercised their right of expression are continuing.

Germany insists on the full implementation of Mr. Kofi Annan's six points without delay. We will evaluate carefully the situation on the ground. We look forward to the assessments to be provided by the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Envoy.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

Earlier this month, in Washington, D.C., Secretary of State Clinton hosted the most recent meeting of the Quartet. At that meeting, the Quartet principals welcomed plans for dialogue among the parties and discussed ways to support them. We have worked closely with our international partners, including the Quartet, to support the parties as they take steps to re-engage and rebuild communications. We should all support that effort, help to create a conducive climate and avoid any initiatives that distract from the pursuit of peace.

On 17 April, we saw the beginning of a dialogue, when senior Palestinian officials delivered the first letter in an exchange with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. In a joint statement issued following the meeting, the parties said, "Both sides hope the exchange of letters will help find a way to advance peace". The United States shares that hope and views the exchange as a positive step that builds on the Jordanian-hosted talks and the statements issued by the Quartet since last September.

At its most recent meeting, the Quartet also focused on the importance of fostering continued international support for the Palestinian Authority's important institution-building efforts. In order to realize a future where Palestinians live in a sovereign State of their own, we must vigorously support the difficult steps needed to build the institutions and capacities of a future Palestinian State. We welcome the actions taken by the parties to resolve the outstanding issues related to tax and revenue collection and urge their prompt conclusion. While the parties address these difficult issues, the international community must continue to play a vital role in support of their efforts.

The United States echoes the Quartet's call for continued international support for institution-building by the Palestinian Authority, including for contributions towards the $1.1 billion required to meet the Palestinian Authority's 2012 recurrent financing requirements. That funding is essential to preserve and build upon the Palestinian Authority's institutional gains and to expand economic opportunities for the Palestinian people.

As we look to improve the financial situation on one side, we must do our utmost to promote an atmosphere of cooperation on both sides. International partners should urge the parties to refrain from provocative and unhelpful actions, including in Jerusalem, that undermine trust, cause delay or threaten to derail prospects for a negotiated settlement. Lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians requires both parties to take meaningful steps.

Provocative actions, including rocket fire from Gaza, should be unanimously condemned. Such attacks are unacceptable and serve as a constant reminder of the serious threat posed to civilians by the illegal trafficking of weapons to Gaza. The Palestinians must continue efforts on security cooperation, strengthening public institutions and ending incitement. Any Palestinian Government must accept the principles established by the Quartet, which are the building blocks of an independent Palestinian State: renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and accepting previous

agreements. We likewise urge Israel to continue and to step up its efforts to deter, confront and prosecute anti-Palestinian violence and extremist hate crimes.

Let me also reiterate that we do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. We continue to oppose any effort to legalize outposts. The fate of existing settlements must be dealt with by the parties along with the other permanent status issues.

I will now turn to the situation in Syria, where the threat to international peace and security is both urgent and grave. The scale of the Al-Assad regime's murderous campaign is shocking, with 10,000 Syrians killed and tens of thousands injured and imprisoned, widespread torture and an ever-worsening crisis of displaced persons and refugees. The conflict is also destabilizing Syria's neighbours. In Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, there are already tens of thousands of Syrian refugees. Turkey and Lebanon have recently seen deadly violence spill across their borders.

The United States continues to support the international humanitarian response to the crisis in Syria, providing more than $33 million in assistance, much of it channelled through United Nations agencies and programmes. We will continue to support those in greatest need.

Two days ago, the Council authorized the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria charged with monitoring compliance with the full set of commitments and obligations laid out in Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan. We welcome the positive statements from various Syrian opposition figures and groups about this new Mission, understanding how desperate the Syrian people are for assistance and, ultimately, for political change.

Syrians have said that they hope this mission can help restrain the regime's brutality and that it will help them uphold their rights to express themselves freely, but we are all sober in our expectations. The regime's long track record is one of dependable deceit and deception. The United Nations Mission is therefore unusually risky and dangerous. The Syrian regime should make no mistake. We will be watching its actions day and night. We will work to ensure that there will be consequences should the Syrian regime continue to ignore this Council's decisions, press ahead with its murderous rampage and flout the will of the international community.

Let me conclude by reiterating the United States' appreciation to the United Nations personnel, both military and civilian, who will comprise this new mission. The United States urges the Government of Syria to seize this chance for a peaceful political solution to the crisis before it is too late.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): I congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of April. We trust your leadership and we are confident in your wisdom. I would also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

Let me first assure you that Lebanon remains totally committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and, in this regard, commends the role of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

As for the situation in Syria, Lebanon continues to stand by its principled position of support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and for the right of its people to live in freedom, safety and security. Accordingly, Lebanon has been supportive of the mission entrusted to the League of Arab Nations and United Nations Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan.

Turning to the Arab-Israeli conflict now, let me underline that, in spite of its shortcomings, which are numerous, the latest Quartet statement issued 11 April (see SG/2182) should be commended for having reminded both parties of their obligations under the Road Map. However, since the statement did not spell out what those obligations are, let me recall that, with regard to settlements, the Road Map provides that the "Government of Israel immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001" and that "consistent with the Mitchell report, the Government of Israel freezes all settlement activity, including the natural growth of settlements". Furthermore, in its

latest statement, and in line with its 23 September statement, the Quartet called upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions, if negotiations are to be effective.

I shall not go over the long list of newly erected so-called outposts, or of ongoing settlement activities. However, let me draw the Council's attention to the latest facts. On 4 April, Israel issued tenders for the construction of 1,121 new settlement units in occupied Arab lands: 872 new houses in Jabal Abu Ghneim, renamed now Har Homa, in East Jerusalem; 180 in Givat Zeev, just to the north of Jerusalem in the West Bank; and 69 in Katzrin, in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

As for outposts, according to the Israeli daily Haaretz of this past Thursday, 19 April, Israeli settlers have built 20 new houses on privately owned Palestinian land, in the outpost known as Ulpana in Beit El settlement. In addition, despite orders from the Civil Administration of the Israeli Defense Ministry issued in 2011 to stop construction in the Mitspeh Kramim outpost, new houses have been completed and are now occupied by Israeli settlers. The settlers simply ignore the order, and the Israeli army obviously ignored the ongoing construction. Haaretz also reported that following the recommendation of Defence Minister Barak, the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, will be asking his Cabinet to vote on a plan to "legalize" the status of three West Bank outposts — Bruchin, Sansana and Rechalim.

Allow me to repeat the two questions I asked during our last open debate on the Middle East (see S/PV.6706). Are not such activities clearly inconsistent with the road map obligations? Are they not clearly provocative? These are not rhetorical questions. In fact, we strongly believe that the Council should respond to those questions. By not doing so the Council will regrettably yet again fail to stand up to its obligation to meet its responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and security in our part of the world.

I also draw attention to the latest report, issued a month ago on 12 March by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territory under the title "How Dispossession Happens." In addressing the humanitarian impact of the takeover of Palestinian water springs by Israeli settlers, the report shows how in recent years a growing number of springs in the vicinity of Israeli settlements throughout the West Bank have become targets of settler activities, which has eliminated or put at risk access to the springs and their use by Palestinians.

A survey carried out by OCHA in the course of 2011 identified a total of 56 such springs, the large majority of which are located in Area C, on land parcels recorded by the Israeli Civil Administration as privately owned by Palestinians. According to the report, 30 of the springs were found to be under full settler control, with no Palestinian access to them. In 22 of the 30 cases, Palestinians have been deterred from accessing the springs by acts of intimidation, threats and violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers. As for the remaining eight springs under full settler control, Palestinian access has, in four cases, been prevented by physical obstacles, including fencing off the spring areas, leading to a de facto annexation to the settlement, and in the other four by isolating the areas from the rest of the West Bank by the wall and their subsequent designation as closed military zones.

According to the OCHA report, the other 26 springs are at risk of settler takeover, including regular patrolling by the security coordinators of settlements. Some springs have been turned into tourist attractions for settlers. The OCHA report leaves no doubt about how

> "the takeover and development of springs by settlers have multiple ramifications on the daily lives of Palestinians living in affected areas, including the erosion of their agricultural livelihoods".

The report adds that, despite their declining yield,

> "the springs have remained the single largest water source for irrigation and a significant source for watering livestock. Albeit to a lesser extent, springs are also a source of water for domestic consumption. Households not connected to the water network, or those supplied on an irregular basis, rely on them as a coping mechanism to meet domestic needs, particularly during the summer."

Such Israeli practices are in clear violation of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that regard, I need not remind the Council of General Assembly resolution 64/292, on the human right to water and sanitation. In

paragraph 1, the resolution "recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights".

The Security Council should condemn in the strongest terms such Israeli practices and uphold the indisputable right of the Palestinians to the water in their own land. By not doing so the Council will regrettably also fail to stand up for its obligation to meet its responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and security in our part of the world.

Let me conclude by saying that inasmuch as we consider the road map statement commendable in calling for all parties to abide by their road map obligations, we also find it profoundly inappropriate that it uses such a term as "a future Palestinian State". The State of Palestine is not an entity to come into being in the future. It exists at the present time. As a matter of fact, the State of Palestine has been recognized as such by a large majority of the States Members of the United Nations. As a State it is a full member of UNESCO. But the State of Palestine is an occupied State. Hence it would not be enough for the Council to recommend to the General Assembly the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. It is also the Council's duty to ensure an end to the occupation of the State of Palestine.

Accordingly, the question of Palestinian statehood can in no way be subjected to the outcome of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Otherwise, Israel, the occupying Power, would be granted a right of veto over the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people — a right that was recognized by the General Assembly as inalienable in 1974 in its resolution 3236 (XXXIX).

We all know that, ever since the idea of an inalienable right made its first appearance in a political document — none other than the 4 July 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States of America — it has been clear that what is meant by an inalienable right is a right that can be neither surrendered nor negotiated. In line with the words of the chief author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man, we can safely assert that, in the case of Palestinian self-determination, nothing is non-negotiable except their inherent and inalienable right to a State.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the 120 countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). I will start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing to the Council today.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its conviction that the international community, particularly the Security Council, must act urgently, resolutely and collectively to fulfil its longstanding commitment to, and responsibility for, the realization of the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects on the basis of international law and the well-established terms of reference of the peace process, including the resolutions of the Security Council. It is evident that the global consensus to realize the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is long overdue, and that its continued postponement will only put that noble goal further out of reach. NAM therefore reiterates that serious international action in a timely manner is required, as the window of opportunity for achieving the two-State solution based on the 4 June 1967 borders is rapidly closing. Failure to seize this opportunity will likely usher in yet another era of uncertainty, instability and continuing conflict, which must be averted at all costs.

NAM regrets that all efforts exerted to date by international and regional parties, including by the Quartet during its 11 April meeting, as well as the valuable efforts by Jordan to revive negotiations between the two sides, have been unable to achieve any progress. That is due to deliberate obstruction by Israel, the occupying Power, and is rooted in that country's refusal to respect and adhere to the well-known parameters of the peace process, as well as its insistence on continuing illegally and aggressively to change facts on the ground, in total contradiction to the objective and principles of the two-State solution.

Such actions prove the fallacy of Israel's claims that it accepts the solution, that it accepts the Quartet statement and the road map, and that it actually seeks to end this conflict. Quite to the contrary, Israel's illegal measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in particular its massive

illegal settlement campaign, are entrenching its nearly 45-year military occupation and prolonging the conflict as well as the injustice being endured by the Palestinian people. In that regard, NAM welcomes Palestinian efforts to resume credible negotiations based on the letter of 17 April addressed to the Israeli Prime Minister by President Abbas, and calls on Israel to respond positively to that effort.

The Non-Aligned Movement recalls that the final status negotiations, which began with great hopes in September 2010, under the auspices of President Barack Obama, with the participation of the Quartet, Egypt and Jordan. Those negotiations, which were aimed at concluding an agreement within one year, collapsed just a few weeks later due to Israel's refusal to renew its moratorium on settlement activities, cease its illegal settlement campaign and abide by the internationally endorsed parameters for negotiations based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. Even while claiming to cooperate with the Quartet, Israel has continued daily to grossly violate its road map obligation to cease all settlement activities, including those stemming from so-called natural growth, and to dismantle all settlement outposts.

Israel's credibility as a peace partner thus remains in serious doubt, as peace efforts continue to be undermined. Even more dangerously, the two-State solution based on the 4 June 1967 borders — the most viable solution at the core of a comprehensive peace settlement — is being gravely threatened, with discussion of alternative solutions gaining prevalence.

NAM condemns Israel's illegal settlement activities in all their manifestations, along with all other illegal practices that country continues to carry out in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and calls for their full and immediate cessation. NAM stresses that all unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is rejected and unrecognized by the international community. We call on the Security Council to implement its relevant resolutions and for serious efforts to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, as well as to compel it to end its military occupation of the Palestinian territory and all other Arab territories going back to 1967.

In the light of the very difficult conditions on the ground, NAM again calls for the implementation of the recommendations made to the Council on 18 January by Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, with regard to the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Specific measures are necessary, in particular to address the grave impact of Israel's settlement policies on the Palestinian people and their land, including violent actions by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including children, and property. Israel's illegal colonization of the occupied land, displacement of the Palestinian civilian population and imposition of collective punishment are deepening the humanitarian suffering and despair of the Palestinian people, while further fragmenting the territory and its contiguity. That situation is dramatically raising tensions and instability and must be a cause for concern to the Council in line with its Charter duty for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In that regard, recent provocative Israeli announcements regarding the establishment of thousands of new settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, along with the continued demolition of Palestinian homes and devious attempts by the Israeli Government to legitimize its illegitimate settlement schemes, require an urgent reaction by the international community, including the Security Council, if the two-State solution is to be salvaged.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call for the Security Council to act and demand that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its legal obligations. Illogical pretexts for illegal actions, arrogant disregard for the law, and blatant impunity must not be tolerated. The clear conclusion is that the occupying Power is deliberately obstructing the attainment of regional, and consequently global, peace and security. That therefore requires credible action by the Council, consistent with its Charter duties.

Israel must not remain the exception to every rule of international law, while at the same time posing as a democratic and law-abiding Member of the United Nations. It must be required and compelled to abide by all of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the road map. That is the true key to advancing the resumption of direct negotiations towards an urgently

needed peaceful settlement based on the two-State solution to the conflict.

NAM remains concerned by the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and calls once again for the full and immediate lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade in compliance with international humanitarian law, which prohibits collective punishment of a civilian population under occupation, as well with resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant United Nations resolutions.

NAM also seizes this opportunity to express its support for Palestinian reconciliation efforts, which continue to be shepherded by Egypt, and hopes that Palestinian unity will soon be restored in the interest of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. NAM looks forward to this achievement and to the holding of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections in the coming period.

NAM is hopeful that 2012 will finally be the year that brings peace and justice to the Palestinian people, including refugees, and that finally brings an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all respects. The Council must therefore demand that Israel, the occupying Power, respect all its legal obligations. It must also assist the parties by setting forth clear parameters, as enshrined in its own resolutions, for peace negotiations within a specified time frame that will actually bring to fruition the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, thus achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and all its neighbours.

The larger United Nations membership also has a crucial role to play in upholding international law and United Nations resolutions in order to promote a peaceful settlement. NAM continues to believe that concrete efforts by the General Assembly, as well as by the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect for the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, would be a vital contribution. Accordingly, on 16 January, as mandated by the Movement, the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau addressed another letter to the Permanent Representative of Switzerland, in that country's capacity as depositary of the Geneva Conventions, requesting the undertaking of measures to convene a conference of the high contracting parties as soon as possible for this purpose, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions. NAM welcomes the positive intentions expressed by Switzerland in its letter of 22 March, and hopes that those efforts will be translated into actions in that regard as soon as possible.

At a time when the two-State solution is being severely weakened, and should be strengthened, we recall the application submitted by Palestine on 23 September 2011 for admission to membership of the United Nations. We look forward to action by the Security Council that recognizes the legitimate and historical rights of the Palestinian people and contributes to peace efforts. We are indeed at a critical juncture and must collectively do all we can to prevent further destabilization and the continuation of this tragic, destructive conflict, promoting peace, justice and security instead.

Turning to Lebanon, NAM condemns Israel's ongoing violations of that country's sovereignty and its recurrent serious breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all parties concerned to comply fully with that resolution in order to end the current instability and avoid a resurgence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions that Israel, the occupying Power, has taken or may take to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as any measures to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in compliance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): As Chair of the Arab Group for this month, I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his update.

The monthly briefings that the Secretariat provides to the Security Council on the latest developments in the Palestinian and Arab territories under occupation since 1967 reflect, in one way or another, the gravity of the legal, humanitarian and political violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. They include its

continued and systemic expansion of illegal settlement activities deep in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and surroundings areas, the expulsion of the Arab population from their homes and the continuing confiscation of private and public land and property, all of which undermine the elements of the Palestinian State and its National Authority.

The Arab Group reiterates its condemnation of all those grave actions and practices by Israel, which are the direct cause of the failure of every regional and international effort made to date to resume peace negotiations, and which have also fomented anger, tension and instability in the region as a whole. The Arab Group is deeply concerned at the international community's continuing inability to end such violations and aggressive measures on Israel's part. This has encouraged Israel to continue its provocative policies concerning the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones as part of its efforts to consolidate its occupation of Palestinian land, in particular in East Jerusalem, with the aim of drastically changing that city's demographic, historical and religious nature and Arab character ahead of the results of the negotiations.

The Arab Group regards such Israeli practices as null and void and contrary to the principles of the Charter and the provisions of international law, the relevant international resolutions and the road map. Today, we therefore demand that the international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, assume its full responsibility for the task of forcing Israel to immediately cease its dangerous policies, through, among other acts, immediate cancellation of all illegal decisions and unilateral measures it has taken in this regard.

We also call on Israel to immediately halt all its settlement activities, with a view to laying the groundwork for urgent and unconditional peace negotiations designed to reach a just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian question based on a two-State solution and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

We are deeply concerned at the continuing dire humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinian people as a result of the Israeli occupation and blockades. We call on Israel to immediately lift its closure of the Gaza crossings, in compliance with resolution 1860 (2009), as well as to remove all military barriers in Palestinian towns and villages, which limit trade and the movement of Palestinian citizens. By the same token, we demand that Israel end its repeated attempts to withhold customs and tariff revenues due to the Palestinian Authority.

We hope that the international community will increase its economic, financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and we urge donor countries to fulfil their share of the commitments to contribute $1 billion to the annual budget of the Palestinian Authority for 2012, based on the calculations made by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians at its March meeting in Brussels, in order to enable the Palestinian Authority to bring its growing fiscal deficit under control and fulfil its responsibilities to the Palestinian people.

On the humanitarian front, we call on Israel to immediately and unconditionally release all Palestinian prisoners living in difficult and illegal conditions in Israel's prisons and detention centres.

We reiterate our total condemnation and rejection of the continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan. We consider all measures taken by its occupiers, which should be ended, to be null and void.

We also deplore Israel's relentless violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air, and ask that the international community compel Israel to abide by its obligations as set out in resolution 1701 (2006), in particular with regard to implementing its military withdrawal from the Lebanese territory it still occupies.

With regard to the crisis in Syria, the Arab Group supports resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), as well as the efforts of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan to resolve the crisis peacefully, in accordance with his mandate and the relevant decisions of the Arab League, which include a political road map for the Syrian crisis based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that regard, we reiterate our support for the resolutions adopted at the recent summit of the League of Arab States in Baghdad, which condemned the Syrian Government's serious violations of Syrian civilians' human rights and called on it to immediately end all killing and acts of violence; to protect civilians; to ensure their freedom to demonstrate peacefully; to immediately release all those detained during such

events; to withdraw its military forces and other armed presence from all cities and villages and to allow immediate access to Arab and international relief organizations.

We hope that the parties concerned in Syria will assume their national responsibilities and comply strictly and transparently with their commitments and pledges, as set out in the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan to resolve the situation, with a view to ending the bloodshed of the Syrian people, allowing them to achieve their legitimate aspirations, and restoring security and stability throughout the country.

In conclusion, we hope that the Security Council, as part of its responsibilities in this area, will adopt the critical measures required to revive the efforts needed to achieve comprehensive, just and lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.30 p.m.